



Klamath Network Featured Creature

April, 2007

Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*)

General Description:

Although sometimes called antelope, pronghorn are not closely related to the animals of African plains. In fact, they are so different from other hoofed animals that they are the only members of the family Antilocapridae. Their head ornaments set them apart from deer and elk whose branched, solid antlers are shed each year, and from goats and cattle whose hollow horns are made from hair and are not shed. Pronghorn have branched, hollow, hairlike horns that are shed annually. They are the only animal with this unique combination.

Pronghorn weigh between 75 and 130 pounds, with the males being larger than the females, and stand 31 to 40 inches (79-102 cm) tall at the shoulder. About 40% of the females have horns, but they don't get any longer than their ears and never fork. A buck's horns are up to 20 inches (51 cm) long and have the distinctive prong on the front which gave the species its name.

Pronghorn also have very large eyes providing visual acuity likened to that of a human looking through 8X binoculars, and a 320 degree field of vision.

Feeding:

Pronghorn are selective, opportunistic foragers that feed on forbs, shrubs, grasses, and sometimes cacti and domestic crops.

Behavior:

Pronghorn are famous for their speed! They can run at up to 60 miles (100 km) per hour, second only to the cheetah's top speed of 70 m.p.h. But while the cheetah can sprint for just a few seconds, the pronghorn can maintain its freeway stride for a sustained amount of time, with some reports of up to an hour.

A Pronghorn's day is spent napping and foraging for food in the open plains, which usually gives them plenty of time to see and elude approaching threats. With strong herd instincts, they alert others of danger by erecting their white rump hair. Once alerted, they can outrun any predator fairly easily. The herd travels as one, not leaving a single animal open to attack.



Pronghorn, Fort Rock, Oregon
Photo www.naturespicsonline.com

Pronghorn, although built for speed and endurance with oversized heart and lungs, are very poor jumpers. Therefore, when they come across a fence they are forced to crawl under or go around.

Habitat and Distribution:

Pronghorn like open, flat valleys to make use of their impressive speed and eyesight.

True Americans, pronghorn are found only on the plains and grasslands of North America. Like bison, seemingly endless numbers once covered the west, stretching from Saskatchewan to just north of Mexico City. And like bison, they nearly became extinct. Populations declined from an estimated 30-60 million in the early 1800s to less than 15,000 by 1915. A moratorium on hunting until the 1940s and conservation efforts reversed the population decline. Today there are almost 1 million pronghorn, with the greatest numbers in Wyoming and Montana.

Where to see it in the Network:

Pronghorn are located in the easternmost parks of the Klamath Network. There are confirmed numbers in Lava Beds and there are also likely herds that enter Crater Lake and possibly Lassen Volcanic at times in the summer.

More Information:

Readings:

Alexander, John Byers, 1998, *American Pronghorn: Social Adaptations and the Ghosts of Predators Past*, University of Chicago Press

Web Resources:

<http://www.gpnc.org/pronghorn.htm>
<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/arizona/pronghorn.html>